



U.S. Immigration
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Enforcement

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News Release

Los Angeles man charged in ICE probe for having sex with minors in Thailand ***Suspect kept “souvenirs” of his victims, including photos and locks of hair***

LOS ANGELES – A 57-year-old Los Angeles man who formerly worked as an English teacher in Bangkok is expected to make his initial appearance in federal court here today on charges stemming from an investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) that he engaged in illicit sexual conduct with underage boys while living in Thailand.



Steven Erik Prowler was arrested in May 2005 by the Royal Thai Police in Bangkok after the police, acting on a tip, saw two youths leaving the suspect's apartment. The boys, ages 15 and 16, subsequently told police that Prowler had paid them to engage in oral sex. Thai authorities contacted ICE agents in Bangkok immediately following the arrest. Thai authorities prosecuted Prowler for molesting the youths and he remained jailed on the local charges until being turned over to ICE last week.

Accompanied by ICE agents, Prowler returned from Bangkok to Los Angeles Saturday to face allegations detailed in a criminal complaint of traveling with the intent to engage in illicit sexual conduct and engaging in illicit sexual conduct in foreign places, charges that each carry a maximum sentence of up to 30 years in prison. The case is being prosecuted by the United States Attorney's Office for the Central District of California.

According to a criminal complaint that accuses Prowler of sex tourism charges, when ICE agents in Bangkok questioned the suspect shortly after his arrest, he stated that he often paid children the equivalent of \$5 U.S. dollars for two hours of sexual contact and that he “felt compassion for the kids.”

Following Prowler's arrest, ICE agents and the Royal Thai Police executed a search warrant at the suspect's Bangkok apartment. There, according to the affidavit, agents found more than 100 photos of naked Thai males, ranging in age from 14 to 16. In addition, investigators recovered numerous hand-written journals where Prowler described sexual encounters dating back more than a decade with underage males in Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and Mexico. Finally, agents found vials, labeled

with boys' names and ages, containing locks of hair. The affidavit states that Prowler told ICE agents he saved the photos and hair as "souvenirs" of the children he had sex with.

"Men who think the abuse of vulnerable children is an acceptable sexual outlet are sadly mistaken," said United States Attorney Debra Wong Yang. "New laws in the United States allow us to arrest, prosecute, and incarcerate those who want to victimize children overseas. Working with colleagues in other nations, we are striving to protect children around the world from predators who will stop at nothing to abuse those most vulnerable people on the planet."

Thursday, the Thai government expelled Prowler, paving the way for his return to the United States. He is expected to make his initial appearance in federal court at 2:00 p.m. today before a U.S. Magistrate Judge.

"The charges against this suspect are a direct result of the extraordinary cooperation we received from Thai law enforcement," said Kevin Kozak, acting special agent in charge of the ICE office of investigations in Los Angeles. "Some pedophiles mistakenly believe they can escape detection and prosecution by committing child sex crimes overseas. We are putting pedophiles on notice that ICE and its law enforcement partners here and abroad stand ready to pursue and prosecute those who sexually exploit children."

Prowler is the third person to be prosecuted by the United States Attorney's Office for the Central District of California on child sex tourism charges under the provisions of the PROTECT Act, which was signed into law by President Bush three years ago. The PROTECT Act substantially strengthened federal laws against predatory crimes involving children outside the United States by adding new crimes, increasing sentences, and modifying the burden of proof requirements for federal prosecutors to bring charges.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.